

“Mary Had a Baby”

Welcome to the fourth Sunday of Advent. It is the last Sunday of the season with the much anticipated birth of Jesus only a few days away. Interestingly, instead of getting a Gospel reading that tells Jesus’ birth is near, we jump back nearly nine months to the very first days of Mary’s pregnancy. Today’s reading, which takes place just after Mary learns from the angel that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, tells us how Mary then hurried to visit her much older cousin Elizabeth, who also had a miraculous pregnancy.

This was not a simple visit like going around the corner. Mary’s cousin Elizabeth lived in another town about 100 miles away. We might make the decision to drive 100 miles without much thought but Mary did not have a car, motor scooter, or even a bicycle. She was going to have to make this trip the way most people did, by walking. So after meeting the Angel Gabriel who tells her she is pregnant, she decides to go for a 100 mile walk. That is like walking from here to Richmond. And that is what Mary does.

When she finally reaches Elizabeth’s house we get one of the most beautiful scenes in the entire Bible. For when Mary says hello to Elizabeth the baby in Elizabeth’s belly jumps! Pregnant women know how it feels to have a baby kicking, but this seems more extraordinary. Because when this baby hears Mary’s voice he jumps in recognition that the mother of the Son of God is speaking. This baby, by the way, will grow up to be John the Baptist. The baby who has just started to form inside Mary is so special that all Mary has to do is walk into a room and say “hello” and something special happens.

Even more special is what Mary and Elizabeth say. Elizabeth says to Mary “blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” That is a poetic way of saying to Mary you are really special with God, and your baby is special with God, too. But the poetry doesn’t stop there. These two women are just getting going. Next Mary sings a song to Elizabeth. Her song tells Elizabeth just how much Mary feels blessed by God. But this song is so special that it has its own name. It is called the Magnificat. Now I say it is a song. The Bible only gives us the words, but it is so musical it must have been a song.

In this song of Mary we are reminded of many of the lessons we have learned during Advent. Let’s go back to the Advent wreath and see.

The first candle is the candle of Hope. In Mary’s song we hear her sing of hope for the world. She tells us that God is fulfilling all the promises God made to Israel’s ancestors, and God is doing it through this baby that Mary will bear who will be called Jesus—God saves.

The second candle is the candle of Peace. Mary tells us that the mighty and the powerful will be brought down and the poor and hungry will be lifted up. What she is saying is that in this new world that Jesus comes to prepare

us for there will not be differences of power or wealth. All people are already equal before God. But in God's new kingdom the ways of the world that allow some people to have a lot of everything and many people to have nothing will no longer be permitted. Everyone is a child of God and in God's Kingdom we will all be loved and safe.

The third candle, the rose candle, is the candle of Joy. This whole song is a song of joy and blessing. Mary is joyful because she is blessed by God with the baby Jesus. She is joyful because even though she is just a poor girl, God has chosen her to be the mother of God's son. The whole world will bless her as God has, and of course, the whole world will be joyful and blessed at the birth of this special baby.

Finally, today we lit the candle of Love. This magnificent song, The Magnificat, is about love. It is about God's love for Mary and God's love for Mary's baby. It is about God's love for the world in giving Jesus to us as a teacher, healer, savior, and example for all time. I don't think there could be a more beautiful song than this one.

In these remaining days of Advent, as you hustle to get the last presents purchased and wrapped, send out the last Christmas cards, go to parties, play in the snow and do everything else that we so desperately try to fit into the season, I pray that you will look again at Mary's song. Read her words out loud. Read them in front of your Advent wreath or Christmas tree. Read them together at night before you tuck in your children or before you turn your light out. This is what it means to be touched by God in the flesh. Just as Mary was touched by God, and just as we can be touched by God in the flesh of God's son our savior Jesus.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: *
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

Gene LeCouteur
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, Virginia

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 19, 2021
8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.

AMEN